JOSE MARTI AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN CUBA*

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To understand the social revolution in Cuba today one must be at once anthropologist, historian, sociologist, political scientist, scientist, economist, writer, philosopher, and something of a rebel oneself. In other words, one must be a Universal Man. Who of us today, however, would pretend to such all-encompassing knowledge? The Cuban Revolution in the nineteenth century, however, did produce such a man, José Martí. Or rather, it would be more accurate to say that such a man produced the Revolution, at least in the sense that Martí was the main publicist for the revolutionary Cuban exiles, co-ordinator of the emigrant groups, money collector, and author of its major political documents.

Although Martí ranks with Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín as a liberator, he is relatively unknown in the United States. Yet his collected works fill seventy-four volumes. One bibliography lists over 10,000 items, including more than a hundred books and more than 200 monographs written about him. Martí was first and last a revolutionist, but he was also a poet, one of the best, and highly praised by such authorities as Gabriela Mistral, Rubén Darío, Miguel de Unamuno, Fernando de los Ríos, Rufino Blanco Fombona, and Amado Nervo.

He wrote a novel, plays, and for fifteen years, from 1880 to 1895, interpreted the United States in his articles as a journalist for important newspapers in the United States and in Latin America. In fact, if his work were as well known as that of Baron Alexis de Toqueville's *Democracy in America,* and Lord Bryce's *American Commonwealth,* his significance to the United States would place him above these other writers. For with consummate skill and sensitivity, Martí probed the depths of social, economic and political change in the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and evaluated its strengths and weaknesses with rare understanding.

The revolutionary philosophy of Martí is to be found in part in the *Resoluciones,* an enunciation of the aims of the Cuban Revolution by

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Martí and Cuban exiles in Tampa, Florida, on November 28, 1891; in the *Bases y estatutos secretos del Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, the cornerstone of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, revealed on January 5, 1892; and in the *Manifiesto de Montecristi*, signed by José Martí and General Máximo Gómez in the Dominican Republic on March 25, 1895, as the final phase began in the struggle of the Cubans for independence from Spain.

All three documents spoke of the great need for unity among the revolutionary groups, and the importance of continual contact and communications between all elements. An important injunction in the documents was against domination by any one class in governing the nation once victory had been won. As the *Bases* warned, "The Cuban Revolutionary Party does not have as its object to bring to Cuba a victorious group that would consider the Island as its prize and dominion." [1] This was repeated in the *Manifiesto*, which said that the war was not to result in "the insane triumph of one party over another".[2]

Martí also emphasized this point in *Patria*, the newspaper he established in New York in 1892. He wrote,

> The Republic . . . should not be the unjust predomination of one class of citizens over the rest, but the open and sincere equilibrium of all the real forces of the country, and of the free thought and desire of all the citizens.[3]

Martí looked upon the war to liberate Cuba as a holy crusade, but he frequently expressed his opposition to military intereference in politics. He once wrote, "War does not make government impossible but neither is it the proper school to learn the art of governing." [4]

A statement in the *Bases* reflects the Martí ideal for the new Republic. It read,

> The Cuban Revolutionary Party does not propose to perpetuate in the Cuban Republic, with new forms or with changes more apparent than real, the authoritarian spirit and bureaucratic composition of the colony, but to found in the free and cordial exercise of the legitimate capacities of man a new people and a true democracy capable of overcoming through hard work and the equilibrium of social forces the dangers of sudden liberty in a society composed for slavery.[5]

Emphasis upon the word "equilibrium" is significant. It puts Martí in the tradition of the founding fathers of the United States, with their

[1] *Obras completas de Martí*, ed. Gonzalo de Quesada y Miranda (74 vols.; La Habana: Editorial Trópico, 1936-49), II, 117.

[2] *Ibid.*, VIII, 162.

[3] *Ibid.*, IV, 196.

[4] *Ibid.*, XV, 174.

[5] *Ibid.*, II, 120.

perceptive recognition of the need to balance competing factions within the United States so as to assure the viability of an open society.

The three documents, then, in the order of their formation, served to unite the Cuban groups in exile, to form the Cuban Revolutionary Party, and to prepare the Cuban people for the final struggle, for victory, and for the foundation of the Republic. The *Manifiesto* particularly emphasized Martí's faith in the Cuban character, the Cuban's unusual gifts of tolerance, humanity, culture, and devotion to justice. He called for a "clean" war which would be free from the avenging spirit that might be expected to follow the atrocities committed by the Spaniards. Fear of the Negro was to be avoided, and he was to be given his equal place in society. Tyranny was to be circumvented by all possible means.

A consistent theme in the *Manifiesto,* and in many other writings of Martí, was the expression of the need to establish governmental forms that could be derived from native foundations. Imitation was censurable, and, as he once wrote, "Banana wine, even if it turns out bitter, is still our wine." He added, prophetically, "When a problem turns up in Cojímar [Cuba], do not look for the solution in Dantzig." [6]

He expanded this theme in the *Manifiesto*:

> Our country is to be constituted from its very roots with workable forms, grown in Cuba, in such a way that an inappropriate government may not end in favoritism or tyranny.[7]

He added that constitutional government could best assure this.

Martí summed up the purposes of the Revolution as follows:

> To determine and know reality; to develop in a natural mold concrete forms from the ideas that come to us from past experience, and from the events produced by ideas; to base the revolution on dignity, sacrifice, and the cultivated mind in such a way that no harm may come to the dignity of any person; in such a way that no sacrifice may seem useless to a single Cuban; in such a way that the Revolution may not seem inferior to the civilization of the nation . . . and in such a way that it will be consistent with the profound understanding of the labor of man in the redemption and promotion of his dignity: these are the duties and purposes of the Revolution.[8]

His concept of the future Republic of Cuba brought forth in another document an emphasis on the importance of the integrity of the individual.

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[6] *José Martí, obras completas,* ed. M. Isidro Méndez (4 vols.; 2d ed.; La Habana: Ed. Lex, 1948), II, Tomo I, 110.

[7] *José Martí, obras,* ed. Méndez, I, Tomo I, 246.

[8] *Ibid.*

> Either the Republic has as its base the whole character of each one of its sons, the habit of working with their hands and thinking for themselves, the integral employment and respect for one's self, as family honor, the integral employment of others, in short, the passion for the dignity of man, or the Republic is not worth a tear of our women nor a single drop of blood of our brave soldiers. We work for reality and not for dreams.[9]

His insistence on reality contemplated many social, political, and economic reforms to be made in Cuba. He frequently elaborated on the virtues of patriotism, in which he called for self-sacrifice, and service. He wrote, "Obedience is government."[10] He felt that social discipline dignified the obedience of citizens because it deprived public authority of the excuse for being oppressive. Voting he considered as an obligatory duty, since the nation should never be endangered through the indolence of its citizens. He found that sovereignty lay in the will of the people, and that this could best be expressed by voting.

He insisted that public opinion was not a true guide to public welfare:

> Although it is said that government . . . is the manipulation of currents of opinion in a country to arrive at definite political solutions, the truth is that government is not that, but the direction of national forces in such a way that the individual may fulfill his ends in a dignified manner and take advantage in the best way of all the elements of prosperity in a country.[11]

Martí was particularly concerned with the heritage of corruption that had been imposed on Cuba by Spanish colonial régimes. He was well aware that outward changes of form did not necessarily assure needed reforms:

> When politics has as its object merely changing its form in a country, without changing the conditions of injustice in which the inhabitants suffer; when politics has as its object, under the name of liberty, of replacing those in power with even hungrier authorities, the duty of the honest man will never be to stand aside and permit unchained corruption.[12]

The general exercise of law, and respect for it, was an important cornerstone in Martí's conceptual framework of good citizenship. As he expressed it, "There is no worse country in which to resort to violence than that one where law is practiced."[13]

Liberty within the framework of the law was basic to Martí's ideal Republic. He even once defined the Republic as no more than a burning and irrepressible desire in elevated souls to see man happy and free.

[9] *Obras.*, ed. Quesada y Miranda, IX, 155.
[10] *Ibid.*, XV, 152.
[11] *Ibid.*, XXII, 194.
[12] *Ibid.*, II, 179-180.
[13] *Ibid.*, XXX, 181.

Liberty, however, was not something that could be hoarded without reference to others. As he said,

> Every man of justice and honor fights for liberty wherever he may see it offended, because that is to fight for his integrity as a man: and the one who sees liberty offended and does not fight for it, or helps those who offend it, is not a whole man.[14]

Martí, however, did not express a narrow nationalism in this respect. He once said, "Everything in 'Our America' is Cuban, and we fight for human liberty not only in Cuba; we fight to insure with our freedom the independence of all Hispanic America".[15]

Basic to the foundations of liberty was education. "To be cultured is the only way of being free."[16] He also maintained that nothing guaranteed the liberal sentiments of a government so much as the haste it showed in educating the people.

The Maestro, as Martí is often called, was highly critical of scholasticism, which was so widespread throughout Latin America at that time. With its emphasis on theology, rhetoric, and logic, there seemed to be no time for other subjects. Martí felt that a radical revolution in education was necessary to vitalize instruction. He urged that physics, mechanical and practical arts, and the study of scientific agriculture should replace scholasticism. He also insisted that there was no place in the schools for the teaching either of Roman Catholicism or anti-Roman Catholicism. He placed a great deal of emphasis on education in agriculture:

> Teaching in agriculture is the most urgent of all, but not in technical schools, rather in experimental stations, where the parts of the plow will not be described except where the student may see it in operation; and where the composition of the fields will not be explained in formulas on the blackboard, but rather in the layers of the earth itself.[17]

In the realm of economics, Martí was a frequent critic of one-crop economies and the economic and political dependence that would result for the nation in this unfortunate situation. In particular, Martí feared that the United States would use its large-scale purchases of Cuban sugar to achieve political domination of the island.

In a frequently-quoted passage, he wrote that whoever spoke of economic union also meant political union, and that the nation that wanted economic independence would also have to sell to more than one

[14] *Ibid.*, X, 95.
[15] *Ibid.*, XIV, 59.
[16] *Ibid.*, XII, 136.
[17] *Ibid.*, XIX, 177-178.

country, since in the case of one buyer it was unlikely that the seller could set the terms of the sale. He also extended his warning to the dependence of a nation on a one-crop economy, and instead called for diversification of agriculture.[18] He was less interested in industrialization for Cuba.

Martí's natural sympathies seemed to lie with the worker as an integral element of society. In glorification of him he wrote, "I shake every calloused hand with pride." [19] Some of his identification with the laborer is to be seen in his deeply moving and acutely perceptive obituary of the famed and kindly philanthropist, Peter Cooper, founder of the Cooper Union in New York City as a training center in industry, arts, and sciences for the underprivileged. Martí, in his appreciation of Cooper's philosophy, revealed his admiration and identification with the social ideas of the great old man.

> He does not believe in the power of wrath, but in the power of science. He preaches the doctrine that ignorance at times can make even justice hateful. He proclaims that there is no force that will not eventually succumb to trained human intelligence. From the harmony that exists between all known physical laws, and the imperfection and brutal harshness of human life at present, it may be inferred that man does not yet see the gentle, generous rules of life, and that the earth contains in lavish abundance enough to satisfy the desires of all its dwellers. To study the forces of Nature, and learn to direct them is the best way to solve the social problem. Intellectual exchange ennobles men. The ignorant man has not yet begun to be a man.[20]

Martí also wrote an obituary of another retormer, Karl Marx. He wrote sympathetically when he said, "Karl Marx was not only a titanic mover of the anger of the European workers, but a profound seer in the reasons for human misery, and in the destinies of men. He was a man eaten with the desire to do good." Martí felt, however, that Marx was travelling too fast and too much in the dark. He also wrote:

> The Russians are the whip of Reform; but no, these impatient and generous men, contaminated with anger, are not the one to cement the foundations of a new world. They are the spur that awakens a sleeping conscience, but the steel of the spur is not an appropriate tool for building.[21]

Martí was very much aware of the profound social changes that were in formulation throughout the world. He described this state of unrest in an imaginative descriptive passage that appears to have been influenced by a well-known paragraph in the *Communist Manifesto,*

[18] *Ibid.*, XXII, 28-29.

[19] *Ibid.*, XXVIII, 73.

[20] *The America of José Martí,* ed. Juan de Onís (New York: The Noonday Press, 1953), p. 78.

[21] *Obras,* ed. Quesada y Miranda, XXIX, 89.

> A pale, immense man, with an austere face, sad eyes, and dry mouth, dressed in black, walks with grave steps, without rest or sleep, through all the land. And he is seated at all the firesides, and he has placed his trembling hand on everybody's head.[22]

His interest in Marxism, then, was ephemeral; he had very little to say about it elsewhere in his writings. What does stand out, however, through his works is a profound respect for the dignity of man, the respectability of manual labor, democracy, equality for all, and devotion to justice through law. He felt that the citizen was obliged to vote, to punish corruption, to practice social discipline by the avoidance of extremes, and to be an independent thinker.

He was opposed to the domination of the government by any one class or party, and instead believed that an equilibrium of forces in the nation would best assure free institutions. He was thus opposed to tyranny from any quarter, although he was most fearful of domination by the military.

He was against imitation of governmental forms that were alien to the native foundations of the Cuban people. His belief in law caused him to say that constitutional government was best, but only if it were authentic. He called for patriotism, but not narrow nationalism. Concern for liberty was central to his thoughts, but it was not to be only an individual or even national objective, but one to be sought throughout all the Americas.

He called for economic reforms that would reduce a nation's dependence on one-crop economies, and that would result instead in diversification of agriculture. He expected to accomplish this in part by rejecting scholasticism in education for practical subjects. His faith in education was reflected in his faith in the Cubans themselves and their ability to progress through free institutions.

Fidel Castro asserted at his famous trial in Santiago de Cuba in 1953 that Martí was the intellectual author of the 26th of July Movement, and that he carried the doctrines of the Maestro in his heart.[23] The influence of Martí on Castro has been noted by Teresa Casuso, a former close associate. She has written, "Fidel showed that he had read a great deal of José Martí, who seemed, indeed, to be the guiding spirit of his life." [24]

If Martí has been Fidel Castro's model in some respects, such as in

[22] *Ibid.*, LXII, 195.

[23] Fidel Castro, *La historia me absolverá* (La Habana: Imprenta Económica en General, n. d.), pp. 6, 47-8.

[24] Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro* (translated from the Spanish by Elmer Grossberg, New York: Random House, 1961), p. 103.